un film di FRANCESCO ROSI

TRE FRATELLI

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CAST

PHILIPPE NOIRET as Raffaele Giuranna

MICHELE PLACIDO as Nicola Giuranna

VITTORIO MEZZOGIORNO as Rocco Giuranna/Young Donato

ANDRÉA FERRÉOL as Raffaele's Wife

MADDALENA CRIPPA as Giovanna

ROSARIA TAFURI as Rosaria

MARTA ZOFFOLI as Marta

TINO SCHIRINZI as Raffaele's Friend

SIMONETTA STEFANELLI as Young Donato's Wife

PIETRO BIONDI as First Judge

CHARLES VANEL as Donato Giuranna

ACCURSIO DI LEO as First Friend at Bar

LUIGI INFANTINO as Second Friend at Bar

GIROLAMO MARZANO as Nicola's Friend

GINA PONTRELLI as The Brother's Mother

FERDINANDO GRECO as Second Judge

COSIMO MILONE as Raffaele's Son

MARIA ANTONIA CAPOTORTO as Post Office Clerk

FRANCESCO CAPOTORTO, CRISTOFARO CHIAPPARINO and **FERDINANDO MUROLO** as Friends at Bar

CREW

Directed by **FRANCESCO ROSI**

Story and Screenplay by **TONINO GUERRA** and **FRANCESCO ROSI**

Based on the story by **ANDREI PLATONOV**

Produced by **ANTONIO MACRI** and **GIORGIO NOCELLA**

Cinematography by **PASQUALINO DE SANTIS**

Edited by **RUGGERO MASTROIANNI**

Designed by **ANDREA CRISANTI**

Costumes by **GABRIELLA PESCUCCI**

Music by **PIERO PICCIONI**

Iter Film/Gaumont, 1981

IN SUPPORT OF LIFE, IN OPPOSITION TO DEATH

I have dedicated the film to fathers and sons, to mothers and daughters. And, therefore, consequently to all of us, for each of us is a father or a son, and he who is not a father knows, by having been a son, what that involves, today as it did yesterday, in responsibility and love.

This film is also intended to be an act of trust and hope; that is at least how I consider it, I who conceived it, wrote it with Tonino Guerra, and who directed it with my collaborators: an act of trust and hope in the triumph of reason, trust and hope that we will be able to find once again the feelings and good sense we need in order not to be alone in life and in our struggle.

This film, again and above all, is for life and against death.

I think and I hope that everyone will recognise himself in the characters of the film. As for myself, I am each of them, from the old patriarch to the little girl, as well as the judge, the teacher, the worker, the old mother, the wives, the girl friend, and the professor who stayed in the country and jealously watches over the authenticity of a culture he never wants to see forgotten.

This film, finally, is an attempt to open a window on the world we live in today, on the tormented reality of which we feel both guilty and its victims.

I hoped for a very long time to tell the story of a family, a story which would describe events in the private life of the characters which are determined and conditioned by public events. A story which would also continue the development of the themes of my previous films which bore witness, for good or bad, to certain moments in the life of our nation. That aspiration found its opportunity in one fact: the death of a mother which reunited for 24 hours in their childhood world three brothers who had gone far away to construct their diverse destinies and lives.

A judge, a teacher of young delinquents, a worker. Three cities: Rome, Naples, Turin. Three ages: from the 50 years of the oldest to the 30 of the youngest. Three professions, three activities which are emblematic of the tragic fact of living every day for us, three existences which intertwine with those of others.

Francesco Rosi

BEYOND CINEMA POLITICO

Family as Political Allegory in *Three Brothers*

By Millicent Marcus

Towards the middle of *Tre fratelli* (*Three Brothers,* 1981), Raffaele, a judge, leafs through a photo album of slain corpses, including those of the presumed perpetrator and the victims of the type of terrorist attacks to which he also could be subject, were he to agree to preside over a trial of left-wing extremists. As he falls asleep, the photographs modulate into a nightmare about his own assassination at terrorist hands. This sequence reads like a self-quotation: it could be an extract from a number of Rosi's earlier films—from his very first, *La sfida* (*The Challenge,* 1957), whose protagonist is gunned down at the conclusion; from *Salvatore Giuliano* (1961), which begins and ends with blood-soaked corpses; or from *Cadaveri eccellenti* (*Illustrious Corpses,* 1976), whose title is self-evident. Raffaele's dream serves as a micro-history of Rosi's film career up to *Cristo si e fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli,* 1979)—a career dedicated to *cine-inchieste,* cinematic investigations into cases involving power relationships between charismatic individuals, corporations, criminal organisations and the state. Rosi labelled this approach a second phase of neo-realism,[1] replacing the immediate postwar cinema of objective witness with a new "critical realism with overt ideological intentions",[2] and thus anticipating the *cinema politico* of Costa-Gavras and Elio Petri of the late 1960s and 1970s. Although never a documentary filmmaker, Rosi nevertheless sought to expose the operations of a univocal, partisan truth beneath the surface of events. To that end, he employed a non-linear, investigative style whose editorial violence reveals the inner-relationships and hidden complicities underlying the official version of the facts.

However, the terrorist sequence in *Three Brothers* departs from its cinematic precedents in several crucial ways, and signals the new direction which Rosi's work would take in the 1980s. Had he made *Three Brothers* in the mid-1970s, while still bound to the monolithic ideological truths of his *cine-inchiesta* period, the film would have been dedicated entirely to the terrorist question, and would have been more properly entitled *The First Son* or *The Only Son.* But, by 1981 Rosi seems to have come around to a more subtle and nuanced approach to "the Italian case":[3]

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1. See Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas, 'The Audience Should Not Be Just Passive Spectators: An Interview with Francesco Rosi', *Cineaste*, vol. 7 no. 1 (1975), p. 6.

2. Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. 170.

3. 'Il caso Italia' is Francesco Bolzoni's term in *I film di Francesco Rosi* (Rome: Gremese Editore, 1986), p. 129.

> The problem of terrorism? It is a problem to which a whole film should be devoted, and it's not as though I haven't given it some thought...But I always recoiled because I found myself facing problems of knowledge: if I, as a director, had not been able to disentangle the logic of terrorism, both in its human and in its political reality, in what way could I help the public?[4]

Daunted by the magnitude of the "problems of knowledge" posed by terrorism, and aware that to understand its logic one must live its "human and political reality", Rosi chooses to inscribe the phenomenon in the experience of one of his characters, thus refusing to endow his representation of the issue with the presumed objectivity of a third-person perspective, or to arrogate the authority of an omniscient one. In so doing, Rosi acknowledges the limits of a purely abstract, cerebral approach to the problem, and defers to the superior power of personal witness. In addition, his decision to make the film only *in part* about terrorism might reflect a conscious, anti-terrorist strategy—i.e. not to place the phenomenon centre-stage, not to give it the full press which only serves to promote terrorist objectives, and not to single it out as the privileged symptom of the diseased body politic of the 1970s. By making terrorism one of three manifestations of social disorder (the others are embodied by the younger brothers, Rocco and Nicola), Rosi seeks to demystify and delimit his subject-matter, rather than surrender to terrorism's tyrannical hold over national attention.

Another measure of Rosi's shift from the ideological filmmaking of his *cinema politico* period is the decision to employ multiple centres of consciousness in his film, and, with them, to entertain a plurality of perspectives on "the Italian case", rather than insisting on one totalising approach: "The three brothers are all parts of myself", Rosi explains, "I don't identify with one rather than another".[5]

As the brothers discuss, argue and dream, Rosi's reluctance to take sides makes his film a virtual symposium of views on the plight of contemporary Italy, prompting such approving reactions as those of Pauline Kael: "Earlier, full of theory, Rosi imposes his vision; now, he searches it out—he goes deeper down into himself, and much further into his subject".[6]

Most indicative of Rosi's evolution beyond *cinema politico* is the fact that the terrorist attack is embedded in a dream. It is highly subjective and personalised, leaving behind the realm of documentary, albeit highly manipulated, factuality for the inner recesses of human consciousness. Such a movement had already been foretold in his previous film,

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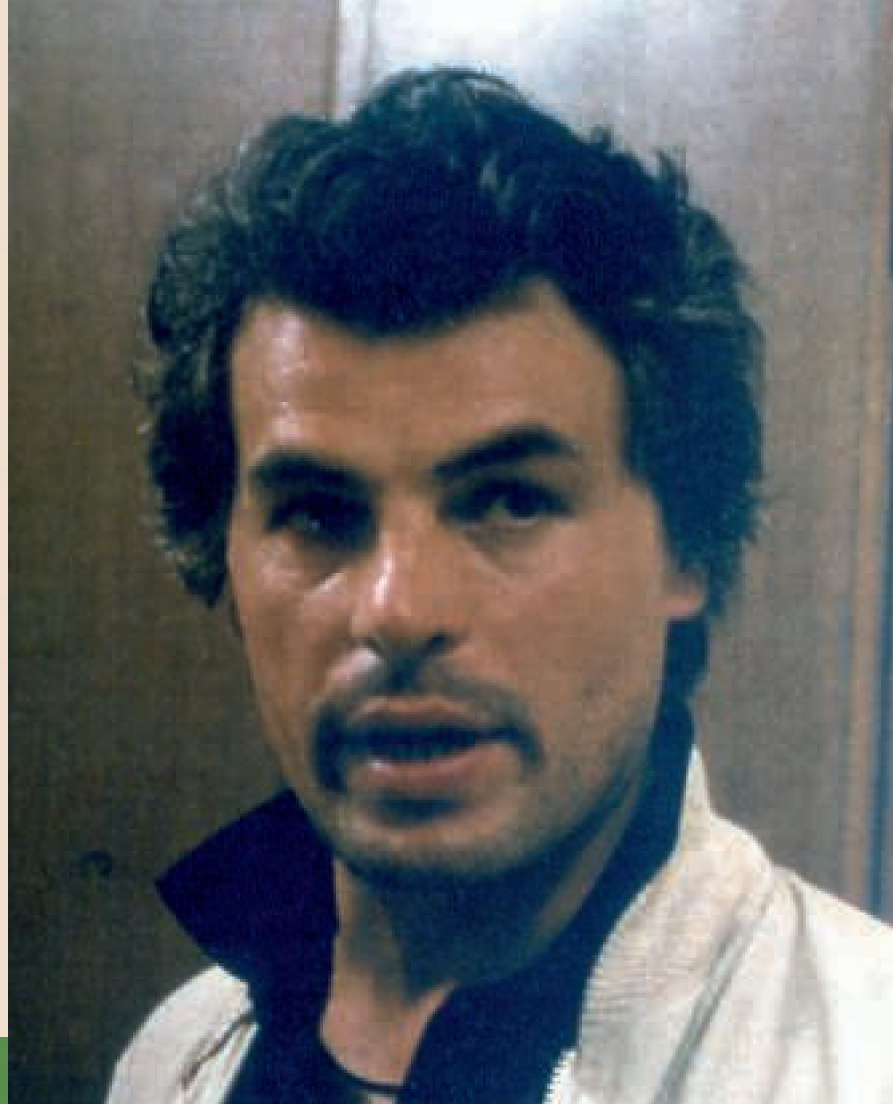
4. Quoted in Franca Faldini & Goffredo Fofi, *Il cinema italiano d'oggi: 1970-1984* (Milan: Arnaldo Mondadori, 1984), pp. 531-532.
5. Ibid, p. 531.
6. Originally published in *The New Yorker*, 22 March 1982, p. 160.



Christ Stopped at Eboli, where Carlo Levi's subjective experience of the peasant world had been translated into the film's own language of long takes, sweeping panoramic shots of the landscape, slow pacing and an emotional musical score. But, in that earlier film Rosi scrupulously respected Levi's personal privacy, never entering into the interior spaces which the writer's own text had so jealously guarded. Dreams, fantasies and memories are never explored in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, whereas *Three Brothers* depends heavily on such psychic incursions to reveal the inner lives of characters, whose reticence in some cases borders on solipsism. To dramatise this move into subjectivity, the film begins in the mind of one of the brothers, Rocco, who dreams about a junkyard teeming with rats, and wakes up to find that the "rats" are the boys in his reformatory who have been routinely escaping and pillaging all night. By anticipating and interpreting the bad news that he is about to learn from the police, Rocco's subjectivity is privileged in the film, inviting us into his nightmarish foreknowledge, and providing us with metaphoric terms for thinking about the plight of contemporary urban "scavengers", as he will call them later, while leafing through a UNICEF report on disadvantaged children.

Piero Piccioni's soundtrack is extremely important to the development of the characters' inner lives. By introducing Rocco's nightmare with the sound of the dreamer's heartbeat, Piccioni immediately locates the viewer *within* the human organism, suggesting the primacy of internal experience over its external causes. Rocco's heartbeat then modulates into the sounds of string tremolos, miming the swells of emotion brought on by the dream itself. Heartbeats will be heard once again in the film during Raffaele's assassination nightmare, while the string tremolos will continue throughout *Three Brothers* to link the film's emotionalism to a unitary familial source.

A second character to be introduced through a subjective experience is Donato, the aged father of the family. Walking down a country road, he comes upon a rabbit, which an elderly woman (presumably his wife) urges him to capture. "I wanted to cook it for you", she explains, "but it ran away. It was afraid of dying." When Donato seizes the animal and hands it to his wife, she lets it go, walks away and herself disappears, rematerialising behind him against the background of their farmhouse. All this remains quite cryptic until the next scene, when Donato telegraphs his sons with the news that their mother has died, and we realise, retroactively, that the hallucination had been a poetic re-enactment of her death. By making us privy to the subjective experience before the information that would give it factual meaning, Rosi privileges the private, interior world of signs over their objective referents, and implicates us imaginatively in Donato's loss. So compressed is the poetic language of this daydream that it condenses an entire lifetime of domestic routine—of hunting, meal planning, cooking and general nurturing—into one simple exchange between husband and wife. Where the rats of Rocco's dream were bearers of all the negativity of contemporary urban life, Donato's rabbit is the repository of his wife's posthumous consolations. In releasing the animal, Caterina tells her husband all he needs to know about her death: it may have been a capture, but it was also a liberation. Later in the film, this insight is affirmed by Raffaele's ancient wet-nurse, Filomena, who reports that she, too, had dreamt of the dead Caterina, and had found her "happy and well". By endowing the subjective sequences with both cognitive and moral authority, Rosi opens up his film to multilevelled poetic interpretation. Whereas metaphor governs the relationship between dream images and their referents (Rocco's juvenile delinquents are rats; the dead Caterina is a rabbit), it is allegory which determines the signifying mode of the narrative as a whole. Thus, the Giuranna family as a disintegrating corporate unit allegorises the plight of the Italian body politic in the postwar era. From their origin in the Murgie region of Apulia, the three sons migrate to Rome, Naples and Turin, respectively, in a re-enactment of Italy's demographic shifts from agrarian to urban centres, from south to north. True to the universalising thrust of allegory, the family's geographic origin is never named—it remains the generic southern Italian town whose populace is composed predominantly of card-playing elderly men. The one visible young woman in the town, Rosaria, is married to a guest worker in Germany, who returns home twice a year. When Raffaele encounters an old schoolfriend in the town bar, this lone specimen of non-geriatric manhood is apologetic about not having migrated elsewhere. Like the emblematic Tara in Bernardo Bertolucci's *La strategia del ragno* (*The Spider's Stratagem,* 1970), an entire generation is absent from this Pugliese town and, by extension, from rural Italy itself, whose population will not be replenished once the elderly have died off. Thus, the funeral of Caterina serves to allegorise the death of the rural Italian past, and offers the occasion for the brothers, representatives of the new social order, to take stock of a national identity now cut off from its source.

Like so many Italian films of the postwar era, *Three Brothers* found its most sympathetic audiences abroad. The problem with the domestic reception seemed to reside in the film's allegorical structure, which provoked a Crocean resistance to Rosi's didacticism as "non poesia" ("non-poetry")—as uninspired, sterile and programmatic. Foreign audiences, on the other hand, seemed willing to accept the film's pedagogy as an integral part of its visionary mode. Since the allegorical method in modern fiction will only succeed when the literal level is sufficient unto itself—expressive in its own autonomous terms—detractors of *Three Brothers* were obviously insufficiently engaged at the narrative level to move beyond it in search of ulterior meanings. Hence such critics' resentment of a significance which they perceived to be imposed from above or, as Francesco Bolzoni put it, "just as he had done in his earliest films, it seems that here Rosi first sought a sociologically interesting datum, and then constructed around it the semblance of a character".[7]

7. Bolzoni, p. 132.

On the other hand, admirers of the film, such as Pauline Kael, defended it in suggestive terms: "even though the structure is schematic", she argues, "the film moves on waves of feeling". I think therefore that the viewer's disposition to accept or reject Rosi's allegorical superstructure is established in the first few moments of *Three Brothers,* in the subjective sequences of Rocco's nightmare and Donato's daydream—sequences which either succeed or fail in carrying us on those "waves of feeling" so necessary to our engagement in the film's literal level. Thus, Rosi's privileging of subjectivity is the necessary precondition for his allegorical mode, whose failure for Italian audiences may be attributed either to its low threshold of tolerance for terrorist treatments, or to its Crocean impulse to dismiss allegory as "non-poetry".

In accepting the allegorical justification for the film's structure, a series of schematic correspondences emerge. The three brothers each personifies a facet of the modern Italian condition; they embody the cities to which they have emigrated; and they experience mid-life crises of a personal or professional nature. In terms of narrative symmetries, each brother enacts his characteristic relationship to the town of origin, and each has a dream or wish-fulfilment fantasy which reveals that individual's hidden self. The allegorical schematism even extends to the brothers' modes of return to their birthplace: Raffaele, the family celebrity, arrives by airplane and then by taxi; Nicola, the car worker, by car, appropriately; and Rocco, the semi-monastic reform school teacher, on foot. If Bolzoni is correct in arguing that "Rosi's cinema rather belongs to the character novel" and that his dramatis personae are "character-functions" who guide viewers through the vicissitudes of recent Italian history, it would behove us to attend carefully to Rosi's portraits of his family members.

Raffaele, the first-born, in professional terms is the most successful of the brothers. Donato's obvious pride in his distinguished son emerges in the post office scene, when he instructs the clerk to send a telegram to "Raffaele Giuranna, *judge*", and repeats this appellation with obvious pleasure at the conjunction of name and title. Based in Rome, Raffaele embodies the professional power establishment, and the various spaces with which he is associated (a car in rush hour traffic; the office he shares with an assistant; his austere but elegant apartment; the corridors of the court house) define life in the centre of things—in the geographic mid-point of Italy, of class structure, of family, and of the judicial system. But his is a centre that will not hold: his son is having an affair with an older woman and is absent from home when most needed; his own marital relations are sorely tried by the terrorist threat; and his government's hold on power is tenuous at best, given the impact of leftist extremism on all social institutions.

Rosi, who did not presume to fathom the logic of terrorism, experiences through Raffaele "its human reality and its political reality" by showing its concrete effect on an individual life. Raffaele carries a gun, receives death threats, can maintain no fixed schedule, must always try to blend into a crowd, takes separate holidays from his wife and son, and cannot bring his family to his mother's funeral. In the paranoid dream discussed earlier, a photograph album of terrorist victims modulates into a nightmare of his own assassination, culminating in the flash of the police camera documenting his own bloodstained corpse. The image of his body will now enter the chain of signifiers which constitute the book of terror, to be read by the next prospective judge of a politically sensitive trial.

Although an embodiment of the power establishment, Raffaele is not uncritical of it. As such, he may be said to occupy the Centre-Left of the political spectrum, advocating constructive, gradualist reform from within the system. In a remembered or imagined dialogue with a judicial colleague prior to his paranoid dream, Raffaele argues that punishment alone is insufficient to resolve the problem of terrorism, and that government must address its root cause by deterring youths from political lawlessness through a programme of preventive action. Will Raffaele agree to preside over the trial? Although the film begs the question, Rosi drops a series of cogent hints to the contrary. "As if you'd refuse!", snaps Raffaele's wife to him on the telephone in the wake of a death threat sent to their home. Immediately after hanging up, Raffaele engages in a spontaneous seminar in the local bar on the subject of bearing witness against political crimes. "Terror defines itself", Raffaele claims. "It replaces persuasion with fear. But societies can't be founded on fear. Fear's the exception to the rule. The rule must be faith. How can we live otherwise?" Events soon undermine Raffaele's institutional confidence, however. In the same bar, late that night when Nicola goes in for cigarettes, a television newscast reveals what happens to witnesses who turn state's evidence, such as the one about to testify at a murder trial who is gunned down on his way to court.

But Raffaele's faith in the system resists such empirical proofs to the contrary. Very early in the film, a fellow magistrate explains why he resigned from the terrorist case that has now been assigned to Raffaele. "I'd risk my life if I thought it could change things", his predecessor admits. Were the above sentence to be rewritten in the light of Raffaele's faith in the system, the conditional and subjunctive verbs of the contrary-to-fact construction would be replaced by indicative verbs expressing simple causality: "I will risk my life because I think I can change something". By linking willingness to undergo personal sacrifice with a belief in the perfectibility of institutions, Rosi makes Raffaele's choice a foregone conclusion. In the paranoid nightmare and in the telephone booth where Raffaele can barely hold himself up for fear as he receives the news about the death-threat, we see the enormous price that the judge must pay for his faith. The dream and the

anxiety attacks are measures of what Raffaele must fight in himself, indexes of the internal resistance against which he must struggle to maintain his idealistic resolve.

If the family as a corporate unit functions as a microcosm of the body politic as a whole, we would expect the Giurannas to express the conflict between radicalism and the power establishment that plagued Italy throughout the 1970s. Although no terrorist, Nicola is the next best thing—a militant unionist who does not shrink from the use of violence to redress the abuses of the capitalist system. Hence the strategy of physically beating department heads joins the repertory of labour's more benign tactics—those of protest marches, strikes, picket lines and absenteeism—to promote the quest for worker justice. In terms of official party allegiances, Nicola would belong to the militant wing of the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party – PCI) or to the more radical Partito Democratico di Unita Proletaria (Democratic Party of Proletarian Unity – PDUP), a post-'68 organisation advocating radical social change, which, while not overtly supporting terrorism, did not condemn the use of violence for revolutionary ends.

Predictably, Nicola engages in constant polemics with Raffaele, the embodiment of the status quo within the family unit. As the oldest and youngest siblings, respectively, Raffaele and Nicola are twenty years apart, so that the former would have come of age during the political *restaurazione* of the 1950s, while the latter would have matured in a post-1968 climate of anti-bourgeois revolt. This means that the Raffaele-Nicola conflict verges on the generational, resembling no less than a traditional father-son struggle for dominance. It also means that, while Raffaele would have migrated to Rome in an era of relative openness, which would have given him access to a university education and good professional advancement, Nicola would have arrived in Turin during the massive onslaught of southern migrants to the industrial north. Rosi thus goes to some pains to show how the difference in their perspectives is historically and economically conditioned. Like the pitiful, disoriented protagonist of Ettore Scola's *Trevico-Torino: Viaggio nel Fiat-Nam* (*Trevico-Turin: Journey in Fiat-Nam,* 1972), cited by Nicola as the cinematic prototype of his own experience, this young Pugliese transplant found himself alienated, ghettoised and exploited in the inhospitable north. Against such cultural and economic violence, Nicola felt that he had no other recourse than that of militant syndicalism. Yet, in his polemics with Raffaele, the younger brother insists on maintaining a distinction between the violence sponsored by the unions and that practised by the *brigatisti:* "Our struggles, strikes and demonstration marches are a far cry from terrorist action", Nicola claims. "There are different kinds of marches", Raffaele quibbles. "There are 'self-defence' marches and marches for proletarian expropriation where the marchers carry Molotov cocktails and P38. How many kids became terrorists like that?". While Nicola argues that there is a qualitative difference between union militancy and terrorism, Raffaele holds that it is merely a question of degree. Once violence enters into the equation, distinctions become arbitrary and thrashings escalate into killings with appalling ease.

For all Nicola's political ranting and raving, however, his fantasy life reveals preoccupations of a far different sort. It is his marital situation which obsesses Nicola when he is not busy arguing with Raffaele, although the sexual and the political in the film are by no means distinct orders of experience. Through his troubled marriage to a Turinese woman, Nicola encounters in his erotic life the regional divisions and tensions that beset the Italian body politic as a whole. "A typical northerner", he complains to Raffaele. "We even argued about what to serve with orecchiette. Butter and cheese instead of tomato, according to madam". Nicola's use of regional stereotypes, however, is far more insidious and morally suspect than this petty charge of culinary incompatibility would suggest. "She had a fling", he confesses. "We're southerners and I won't put up with this." When Raffaele counters with reminders of Nicola's own sexual truancy—"I'm sure she put up with a lot more. I know you."—we realise that the outraged husband is using his regional identity as an alibi. The double standard, it seems, is Nicola's birthright as a southern Italian male.

Thanks to the virtuoso cinematography of Pasqualino De Santis, the best expression of the north-south dichotomy is the visual form it takes in Nicola's daydream of reconciliation with his estranged wife, Giovanna. Although the institutional gloom of the Neapolitan sequence and the rush hour chaos of the Roman ones stand in sharp contrast to the pastoral setting of Apulia, the Turinese sequence seems to occur on another planet. As Nicola lies on his boyhood bed in the house where the brothers grew up, and his mind travels north to Turin, he imagines himself in a surreal space—an ultra-modern arcade leading to Giovanna's apartment building. As if in a de Chirico painting, Nicola traverses this dreamscape, whose architectural masses cast geometric shadows in shades of greens and greys. With oneiric arbitrariness, a young girl roller-skates in a zigzag pattern before the advancing figure of the dreamer. In terms of lighting, colour, resolution of image and *mise en scène,* nothing could be further from Rosi's visualisation of Nicola's homeland, characterised by "the harsh and arid white of a certain South", according to Gian Luigi Rondi. "A white that, with neat lines and dry, precise contours, clashes with the black, both in the extreme close-ups of faces, and the dilated expanse of the long shots".[8]

The surreal entrance to Giovanna's apartment building does little to prepare the viewer for the fluorescent brightness and sterile anonymity of her kitchen, where she and Nicola tentatively reconnect after a six-month period of separation. Shot frontally, this rectilinear space tells the whole story. This is *Giovanna's* jurisdiction and, having merely entered

8. Quoted in Gesu, p. 244.

it, Nicola implicitly accepts her terms for being there. Although his movements are aggressive and proprietary, especially when he unceremoniously raids the refrigerator or helps himself to her wine, she is clearly in control. Only when the camera slowly closes in on him as he discusses his feelings about emigration, does Nicola temporarily command his place within the *mise en scène.* Moreover, since his newfound insights will be the basis for a reconciliation with Giovanna, as well as the construction of a new, non-regional identity, we must consider Nicola's revelations to her in some detail. "How was it down there?", Giovanna asks. He answers:

> Beautiful, and a disaster. Because for the first time, I discovered something new, and very painful. More painful than my mother's death. Sorrow for your mother is something you can live with, I think. I suddenly realized my village was no longer part of me, and I was no longer part of it. My old friends... An emigrant's real tragedy is losing his identity. He thinks he'll be happy when he goes home, but he isn't, so he heads back to the city, to Germany or America, and feels homesick.

Unable to revert to his culture of origin because he has experienced too much, and unable to assimilate into the new social context, the emigrant is doomed to live betwixt and between, never at home, always drifting in search of an impossible rootedness. In the face of this dilemma, the emigrant has two choices: to rail against his lot, venting his anger in futile gestures of violence or self-destruction; or to create a compromise space in which he assumes responsibility for the pain of exile and seeks a revised definition of self.

Having confided in Giovanna, Nicola is now offered the possibility of such a space—not in the harshly lit, rectilinear kitchen, but in the blue-tinged, heavily curtained bedroom along the corridor. Even the camerawork changes accordingly, from the static takes and subdued movements of the kitchen scene, to the smooth, 180° pan that follows Nicola as he circles the bed and undresses in increasingly less than tentative acceptance of Giovanna's invitation to stay the night. Even the dialogue shifts register, from the direct, referential comments of the kitchen scene to the oblique, elliptical language of mutual desire. "It's hot, isn't it?", she begins. "It's these walls", Nicola responds, "at night they let out the heat from the day". "That's why you chose this apartment", she rejoins. "You're right, I thought we could do with some sun". Nicola's attempt to create a compromise space by incorporating southern elements into a northern setting, understood now in the light of his discovery that he can never return home, suggests a therapeutic approach to the emigrant's plight.

Is the imagined lovemaking of Nicola and Giovanna only a temporary solution, or does it signal Nicola's permanent willingness to forego the double standard which he considered a form of regional inheritance? Although one critic argues for the transience of this marital truce,[9] the film hints at the possibility of a more lasting resolution to their domestic troubles. Nicola daydreams of returning to his wife after having renounced the opportunity for a sexual encounter with Rosaria, the childhood sweetheart who had married another man while Nicola was doing military service. It takes little to reignite Nicola's passion for her—a few sultry glances are sufficient to send him prowling around Rosaria's house like the lovesick cat patrolling her neighbourhood that night. After a passionate embrace, however, the couple decides not to make love—Rosaria refuses to defile her husband's bed, and Nicola does not insist. The reasons for his uncharacteristic restraint are significant, suggesting that his sexually self-serving definition of southern Italian manhood has undergone a radical change. Rather than avenge himself on the love rival who had succeeded in wooing her away from him in the past, Nicola chooses to identify with Rosaria's absent husband, himself an emigrant in the north. Nicola's restraint also reflects an awareness that he cannot simply take up where he left off with his fiancee of so many years ago—that he has undergone irreversible changes as an emigrant whose "village was no longer part of me, and I was no longer part of it". In Nicola's case, it is entirely appropriate that this truth be played out in sexual terms.

When Nicola and Raffaele engage in their endless polemics on the night before the funeral, it is Rocco who finally puts a stop to the proceedings by insisting that his brothers shift to more private, personal concerns. "Can't we talk about us?", he implores, "your families, your children?". Rocco, who has neither a wife nor children of his own, remains the most enigmatic of the brothers, and although he is the only character to have two dreams, they do little to reveal his inner self. This could be explained by the fact that Rocco is indeed selfless, lacking the monadic, ego economy that defines identity in a more conventional sense. As director of a Neapolitan reform school, Rocco is altruistically committed to the cause of rehabilitating youthful offenders before they are beyond reclamation. Accordingly, both his dreams relate directly to his sense of social mission. The first, about a rat-infested cityscape, provides Rocco with the metaphor for the disadvantaged children of the world, turned *topi,* or scavengers, through desperation and neglect: "Well-off people should make sacrifices for all humanity, not just their own family. But to do this, we need to change people's hearts. We need to be more gentle towards nature and our fellow human beings, otherwise these scavengers will overrun us here, there and everywhere." This apocalyptic scenario is only reinforced by Rocco's description of an incident involving subproletarian encampments outside Naples, where lawlessness had invited massive police mobilisation: "The police had to come in with armoured cars and tear gas. A war." Consequently, Rocco's second dream involves another type of assault on social misery: a one-man clean-

9. See Bolzoni, p. 132.

up campaign to rid young people of the syringes, rifles and easy money that turn their lives into the human debris of contemporary urban existence. If the other brothers' dreams parody a given cinematic genre—the *cinema politico* of Raffaele's terrorist nightmare, or the "adult" melodrama of Nicola's reverie—Rocco's dream may be said to derive from musical comedy. Set to the music of Pino Daniele's Neapolitan pop song, 'Je so' pazzo', the dream action involves clean-up squads of kids against stylised theatrical backdrops of New York City, Moscow and Naples. Rocco experiences a virtual apotheosis at the end of the song as he climbs a mountain of swept-up debris and raises his arms in triumph with a painted Vesuvius arising in the background on the painted shores of the Bay of Naples. The brazen artifice of Rocco's dream, in contrast to the more realistic modes of his brothers' imaginings, makes explicit its status as pure wish-fulfilment fantasy, and only heightens the sense of his inadequacy in the face of such incurable social ills.

When Rocco intervenes in his brothers' ideological debate, he does so both because he is by nature a peacemaker, and because he harbours a congenital distrust for political solutions. For Rocco, slogans, programmes, party platforms and elected officials are not the key to social justice. As far as he is concerned, the answer lies in a deeply personal notion of *caritas* involving "changing people's hearts", and as such it associates Rocco's code of ethics with a Christian humanist, or even a Franciscan, approach to correct action in the world. It is therefore not surprising that Rocco's interaction with the town is confined to the parish church. No sooner does he arrive at the house and pay his respects to the dead than Rocco visits the local sanctuary where the priest has been awaiting him. "I knew you'd come", Don Vincenzo remarks, as if his advent were somehow foreordained, a necessary element in the providential scheme of things.

Rocco is the brother most closely bound to the world of his parents. He is the only sibling to experience a flashback of his mother as a young woman, and he is inextricably linked with his father through a casting strategy whereby the same actor, Vittorio Mezzogiomo, plays both Rocco and the young Donato. Arriving at the family farm on foot, along the same path down which Donato had walked after fantasising about the meeting with his dead wife, Rocco stops and seems to connect with the landscape in a way which his siblings' automated arrivals necessarily precluded. The casting choice also suggests that of the three brothers, Rocco remains closest to the Utopian values of the land and, in so doing, Rosi naturalises this character's Christian humanist approach to social injustice.

No study of *Three Brothers* would be complete, however, without consideration of the literary source for Rosi's inspiration. Although the filmmaker goes to great lengths to minimise his debt to the textual model, Rosi's screenplay, written in collaboration with Tonino Guerra, owes a great deal to Andrei Platonov's 1936 short story, 'Trety syn' ('The Third Son'). Rosi explains:

> Platonov's story, which is very short, served us as a starting point...the mother's death, the telegram, the brothers who arrive (in the short story there are six of them; here, three), and the relationship that arises between the old man and the child. We also took the child's tears as she realises that her grandmother is dead. All the rest was invented by us.[10]

Although Platonov's seven-page story could provide only the barest of skeletons for Rosi's screenplay, the filmmaker is unfair to reduce his debt to mere elements of plot. What Rosi fails to acknowledge here is the way in which Platonov's text authorised not only the narrative structure of the film, but also, more importantly, its allegorical mode. If Rosi's great achievement in *Three Brothers* is to link familial chronicle to social history, to construct in the family microcosm a compelling reflection of events on the national level, Platonov's 'The Third Son' offers the richest of literary precedents. "An old woman died in a small country town", the story begins, and with the death of this shrivelled-up, biologically exhausted body, Platonov considers the radical changes that take place in the familial body, as a corporate entity, and in the body politic of post-revolutionary Russia. Through a series of focalisers—the old husband, the country priest and the third son—Platonov delivers a powerful social commentary whose subtleties and ironic reversals merit close scrutiny in order to fathom the workings of Rosi's own allegorical mode.

The opening passages of the story are centred in the consciousness of the old man, whose sense of loss permeates all his perceptions, creating a natural and social environment in synchrony with his grief. When an aged female telegraph worker performs her duties with shocking ineptitude, the old man projects onto her his own psychic disarray. "It seemed to him that the elderly woman had a broken heart, too, and a troubled soul that would never be quieted—perhaps she was a widow or a wrongfully deserted wife".[11] Nature, too, reflects his loss—as he waits for his sons by his wife's cold body, the "solitary grey bird" hops about its cage, flakes of "wet, tired snow" fall outside, and the sun shines "cold as a star". If the pathetic fallacy conjures up a natural world in harmony with inner psychic experience, such a device has special appropriateness to the organic coherence of rural life.

With the arrival of the sons, however, this natural cohesion is shattered—even the prose style suddenly shifts to express the disruptive effects of their advent. From the long, flowing, paratactic sentences describing the old man's experiences, the style abruptly changes to one of short, straightforward statements of fact: "The eldest son arrived by aeroplane the very next day". Technology intervenes, and we soon learn that all six of the sons have

10. Faldini and Fofi, p. 531.
11. All quotations from the Platonov story are from Kathleen Cook's translation, *Fro and Other Stories* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972).

done extremely well in the various lines of work that define the new, post-revolutionary state. The oldest is department foreman of an airplane factory; two sons, both sailors, have achieved the rank of captain; another is an actor in Moscow; another is a physicist (and a Communist); and the youngest is a student of agronomy. Such accomplishments in the fields of industry, transportation, science, agriculture and the arts justify the old man's obvious pride in his "powerful sons"—a pride which eclipses his widower's grief: "Their father was not crying any more. He had wept his full alone and was now glancing at his half-dozen powerful sons with concealed emotion and a delight that was quite out of place in the circumstances". As mobile, productive, cosmopolitan and technologically evolved individuals, the brothers exemplify the glorified self-image of the modern Soviet state. In addition to the proud father, another character responds to these "six powerful men" in a way which suggests that their generational significance is ideologically fraught. Of all people, it is the country priest who views them as "representatives of the new world which he secretly admired but could not enter. On his own he used to dream of performing some sort of heroic feat to break his way into the glorious future with the new generations". Platonov reserves his most withering satire for this priest, whose aspirations to heroism combine elements of *deus ex machina* with the latest aviation technology. In this spirit, "he had even applied to the local aerodrome asking to be taken up to the highest point in a plane and dropped by parachute without an oxygen mask, but they had not replied".

'The Third Son' therefore involves two temporalities: that of traditional, agrarian, natural time (the time of birth, death and seasonal cycles) and that of progressive, linear, historical time (that of irreversibility and change). Corresponding to these temporalities are two conceptions of space—those of continuity and rupture—as signified, respectively, by the two bedrooms of the story. Together in the room with the coffin is the marriage bed, occupied now by the old man and his granddaughter. This room is illuminated by the glow of moonlight reflected by the falling snow outside, as befits a space of generational continuity and natural process. Next door, in a room electrically lit, the six brothers are housed as they had been in childhood, but their talk is of metal propellers and voyages to foreign ports. They wrestle, laugh and boast, in keeping with a need to perform their adult identities for one another. The inappropriateness of such behaviour does not seem to bother the old man, so smitten is he by his powerful offspring that he would never dare to question their conduct. But one of the sons is clearly distraught—the third son of the title—and it is he who shames his siblings into a decorous silence which suits the occasion. Crossing the boundary from the sons' bedroom to the room with the coffin, the third brother stands over the corpse for a moment, and then faints from emotion. It is his example of unbridled grief which frees his brothers to mourn at last: "One by one they slipped off to different parts of the house, through the yard and the night that surrounded the place where they had spent their childhood, and wept".

There could be no more poignant proof of the disintegration of the family unit than the separateness of this fraternal grieving, and Rosi puts Platonov's insight to powerful cinematic use in his film's corresponding scene. When Rocco wakes up from his dream and goes into the kitchen to make coffee, he looks out of the window to see his siblings mourning in the courtyard below. Photographing the two brothers from behind Rocco's shoulders, the camera reveals Nicola in long shot, sobbing against the back wall, and Raffaele, huddled apart from him, also mourning in solitude. The spectacle of his brothers' grief triggers Rocco's own outpouring of sorrow—sorrow as much for the death of their mother as for the emotional distance figured in this *mise en scène.*

In the Platonov story the writer goes to some lengths to express the sons' perception of loss, and its implications for a cultural history of the post-revolutionary age. The third brother experiences most acutely what all the siblings had mourned when they first beheld the corpse of their mother: "the lost happiness of love which had welled continuously and undemandingly in their mother's heart and had always found them, even across thousands of miles. They had felt it constantly, instinctively, and this awareness had given them added strength and courage to go about their lives". Read etymologically, this mother is the *matrix*—the principle of the land, rural life, the humus in which their identities are rooted, the basis of all their subsequent accomplishments in life. If, in diachronic terms, the mother allegorises the agrarian Russian past, Platonov's argument is that the successes of the present regime are predicated on the strengths of this ancestral culture. It is of the utmost significance, therefore, that the son most stricken by the death of the mother is the physicist (who is also, importantly, the only Communist Party member in the family) and, as such, the most "evolved" of them all. Yet, it is he who suffers most intensely from the loss of the matrix, and who is most aware of the need for connection to a source. Although we are excluded from his sorrowing—we do not overhear the words with which he silences his brothers, nor do we enter a mind about to lose consciousness before the object of its grief— the third son's reaction becomes normative. Neither the father, blinded by paternal pride, nor the priest, a prey to ideological mystification, can offer reliable judgments on the post-revolutionary age; as such, they serve as foils for Platonov's own judgment, implied in the mute and anguished mourning of the third son.

Motivated by a similar impulse to condemn the rise of industrial, urban culture at the expense of its rural matrix, Rosi fully appropriates Platonov's allegory. The three brothers "belong to a generation that has in some way failed", remarks Rosi, "and for this there is the grandfather and little girl to close the circle, to give sense to the film". Rosi's use of the phrase "close the circle" ("chiudere il cerchio") is significant in this context, for it suggests the notion of temporal continuity which governs the natural world, and anticipates the

image of the wedding ring which heralds the film's Edenic theme. Donato's memories of marriage merge with a vision of the agrarian past as earthly paradise—a blessed site of innocence and rest. To heighten the sense that this is a privileged space, Donato's flashback occurs immediately after the film's most violent moment: that of Raffaele's imagined assassination at terrorist hands.

At the centre of Donato's garden of memory reside a man and a woman—Adam and Eve before the Fall. Although one critic faulted this sequence for its sentimentality, such a reaction fails to acknowledge that this is indeed a flashback, embedded in the idealising consciousness of the newly bereaved.[12] Shot in slow motion, through the diaphanous cloth of the bridal veil, the opening frames of this reminiscence explicitly announce its "soft focus" take on memory. Once the pace increases to normal speed, the camera moves to medium distance to reveal a country wedding party, about to be rained out. Although the proverbial "rained-on bride, lucky bride" ("sposa bagnata, sposa fortunata") may be trite, it is indeed predictive of the long course of happy marriage that awaits the newly-weds. After a brief glimpse at the couple's honeymoon journey in a horse-and-buggy, the flashback reaches its culmination in a scene of surpassing lyricism. Lingering on the beach, Donato tends to the horse while Caterina amuses herself by burying her feet in the sand and sifting great handfuls of it through her fingers. At a certain point she realises that her wedding ring is gone: "Donato, aggio perduto la fede" ("I've lost my wedding ring"), she announces in dialect. "We'll find it, don't worry", he reassures her, and manages to retrieve the ring after cleverly resorting to the help of a sieve. When Donato puts the ring back on her finger and kisses her, we realise that this is the true wedding—Adam and Eve alone in the garden. Without mediations, in an untainted, natural setting, the newly-weds reconsecrate their marriage in their own private state of grace. Against this ideal of marital bliss, all other relationships in the film are measured and found wanting: Raffaele's strained marriage, threatened from without, and Nicola's troubled one, destabilised from within.

Read as political allegory, this lapse has important implications for the course of postwar Italian history, suggesting that contemporary Italy has indeed fallen away from the Eden of its provincial, agrarian past. There is another moment in the film, also associated with the mother, which serves to mark the specific historical coordinates of Italy's fall from a prior state of perfection. I am referring here to the film's first flashback, embedded in the memory of Rocco as a way of linking this particular son to his parents' Utopian context. As Rocco beholds the image of his dead mother, to the accompaniment of the *nenia,* or dirge,

12. For his objection to this scene as eliciting an "easy heart-tug", see Stanley Kauffmann, 'Good Intentions', *The New Republic*, 21 April 1982, p. 25.

of the neighbourhood women, the scene dissolves into a close-up of his face as a child amidst the sounds of shelling and prayer. Called to his young mother's side, Rocco peeks out from her protective embrace to see the rosary dangling before him, amongst his family members and neighbours who have sought refuge from the advancing front. At a certain point, the artillery sounds give way to the joyous pealing of bells, and the camera pans the townscape, bespattered with Fascist graffiti: *Duce, Vincere, Vinceremo.* Now a lone tank approaches as the little community emerges from hiding. A camouflaged army vehicle, like a strange, alien creature, crests the hill, broadcasting the sounds of American jazz from its depths: "I can't give you anything but love, baby". Nothing could be more incongruous than the apparition of this hi-tech equipment, spouting an incomprehensible musical language on a primeval Italian landscape. Moreover, to compound the indecipherability of the event, Donato and his neighbours interpret this as an enemy assault, raising their hands in surrender. When a living human being jumps out of this machine, kisses the ground, introduces himself in English as "Galatti, Salvatore", and then switches into Italian to announce "pure io sono italiano, paisano" ("I too am Italian, *paesano*"), the reversal of expectations could not be more violent. In an appropriate end to this scene of incongruities, the soldier then embraces every civilian in sight.

By synthesising a series of oppositions—Italian vs. American; agrarian vs. technological; enemy vs. ally—this scene invests the Liberation with the highest Utopian significance. It is no accident that the liberator in this episode is an Italian-American named Salvatore, himself a synthesis of the old and the new, returned to his homeland to redeem it from the sins of its past. As Salvatore hugs the young Caterina, their composite image fades into the present-tense scene of mourning, accompanied by the *nenia* of the neighbourhood women. By framing this reminiscence with prayer—the prayer for the dead, here and now, and the rosary on the eve of the Liberation—Rosi associates Caterina's youthful maternal role with the promise of national-popular rebirth, and her death with the disappointment of that promise.

As the moment of highest political idealism, when the military victory against Fascism meant that the new Italy could pursue its agenda for domestic self-renewal, the Liberation also had important consequences for the cinema. In films such as Rossellini's war trilogy (*Roma, citta aperta* [*Rome, Open City,* 1945], *Paisà* [*Paisan,* 1946] and *Germania anno zero* [*Germany Year Zero,* 1947]), the experience of the Second World War gave rise to the cinematic form of neo-realism in order to express the revolutionary power of its subject-matter. Rosi has made no secret of his enthusiasm for neo-realism as a form of political action - itself an outgrowth of the domestic agenda of the Resistance:

> We were all desirous and aware of participating in the reconstruction of the country and we thought that with the cinema we could do something. This, in fact, occurred

> because those films, all told, accomplished a great deal. This is neo-realism, for me, as a fact of life.[13]

It is therefore not surprising that the canonical neo-realist treatment of the Liberation—that of Rossellini's *Paisà*—should be explicitly invoked in this flashback, where the mutual misunderstandings which plagued encounters between Italians and American GIs in the earlier film would undergo "a neat reversal" in Rosi's decision to make the liberators Italian-Americans.[14] Thus, by alluding to the Liberation in his film's first flashback, Rosi is invoking both the political idealism of this historical moment and its privileged mode of cinematic expression. The Liberation and neo-realism thus serve as twin indicators of contemporary Italy's fall from grace.

However, paradise is not entirely lost. In Nicola's daughter, Marta, child of the urban north, the dead Caterina seems to be reborn, closing the circle to which Rosi had alluded in his commentary on the current generation. A series of details suggests that Marta is indeed the very incarnation of her grandmother: she sleeps in Caterina's old bed; receives her grandmother's earrings as an inheritance; is juxtaposed with her image in the family photograph collection; and buries herself in the grain, just as the new bride had done on the beach in Donato's honeymoon reminiscence. In one scene, a mystical bond between grandmother and granddaughter is established as Marta views the corpse from a secret window high above the place of mourning. From this hidden vantage point, Marta appropriates an omniscient view suggestive of Caterina's own perspective from beyond the grave.

Most important to her role in establishing continuity is Marta's acquisition of her grandfather's rural wisdom. Without an alarm clock, Marta wonders, how does he know when to get up in the morning? "Farmers are guided through the day by the stars and the animals", Donato explains. "The cock always crows twice, at one o'clock and at four o'clock in the morning. Old people like me get up the second time he crows, whereas little children like you wait for the donkey to bray around seven. There are three stars. As dawn breaks, they line up. They form the Big Dipper. And then there's a star called the Morning Star, which appears half an hour before dawn." "If I stay with you for a while", the child observes, "I'll learn all these things. In Turin there aren't any cocks or donkeys." "But there are stars", her grandfather reassures her. What Marta learns from Donato, and what she will take back with her to Turin, is the cosmic connectedness of things, the bond between the heavens and the earth, between the natural world and the world of men. As the repository of her grandfather's wisdom, Marta represents genealogical continuity, reversing the effects of the family diaspora and the anti-traditionalism of her father's generation. Such continuity is perhaps best expressed in the image of the egg which Marta offers to her grandfather after the funeral cortege makes its way offscreen.

If *Three Brothers* is about mothers as signifiers of origins, it is important to note that the film's only child, Marta, is literally motherless. Giovanna is off in Turin and there is no maternal surrogate within the reconstituted family in the south. Yet, we do not sense that Marta is in any way bereft or incomplete. In connecting with her culture of origin, she is gaining the metaphorical mother that Nicola regretted losing as emigrant—"he feels the earth vanish from under his feet" ("gli manca la terra sotto i piedi"), as he told Giovanna in his daydream of reconciliation. Marta's discovery of her matrix is rendered in specifically cinematic terms in one of the film's most lyrical moments. Sent off by Nicola to play in the barn, Marta leads our gaze through a labyrinth of miscellaneous farm implements which De Santis's camerawork succeeds in endowing with the magic of childhood curiosity, In one long, fluid take, the camera precedes her into the barn, cranes up and down again, filming her behind the very carriage which the newly-weds had taken on their honeymoon (another connection with the young Caterina), then follows her as she moves left to examine an array of cowbells suspended on the wall, then circles her and cranes up as she moves through the archway into an inner chamber at the end of the take. Now Marta begins to ascend to successive levels of the barn, stopping to play with the chickens housed on the next storey, and then climbing to the uppermost floor of the granary, where she disrobes and buries herself in the grain as if she had finally found her true element.

In one of the film's most significant departures from the Platonov story, the old man and his granddaughter do not follow the coffin to the grave site, but remain behind to give their own meaning to Caterina's demise. Where Platonov's mystified old man was less grief-stricken than "proud and content that he too would be buried by these six strong men, and just as finely", Rosi's widower transforms his loss into a poetic reaffirmation of his marriage vows. Back in the room where her corpse had lain, he finds Caterina's wedding ring and places it on his own finger. This is, of course, the second time he had found the ring, and recalls that Edenic moment when he had reconsecrated their marriage on the beach. With this farewell gesture Donato reweds Caterina, now in the presence of Marta who will "close the circle", to use Rosi's own metaphor for generational continuity. Nor is this ring devoid of political significance, for the Italian word for wedding ring is *fede,* recalling Raffaele's plea for a society based on faith and hope, not violence and fear. If marriage serves as a microcosm of the ideal society—the synthesis of opposites figured

13. Quoted in Aldo Tassone, *Parla il cinema italiano* (Milan: Il Formichiere, 1979), p. 82.

14. For this insight, see Bondanella, p. 333. It should be noted that in the first episode of *Paisà*, an Italian-American soldier, Tony, is included among the liberating forces. But the entire landing in Sicily is met with anxiety and suspicion by the natives, and Tony's command of the Italian language does little to assuage their fears.

in the Liberation scene—the analogy between the wedding band and the social bond is easily drawn. In the image of the circle, Rosi is issuing a plea that Italy keep its *fede* with the ideals of its rural past, and that it seek to recover the matrix, if not in the historical order, at least in memory and art. When Marta returns to Turin, she may not be able to see the stars in the industrial night sky, but at least she will know that they are there.

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CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

Following a Cannes premiere in May 1981, *Three Brothers* opened in British cinemas the following October to a generally very positive critical reception, with a couple of dissenting views.

With Pasolini gone and Bertolucci scarcely filling the bill, Francesco Rosi is becoming more and more the keeper of the Italian cinema's political and moral conscience. [...]. This is not one of Rosi's urgent, angry films but the first that overtly recognises the root cause of violence as being the lack of contact between rulers and ruled. Being a hero, someone says, is a thing of the past. All we can do is survive with dignity. And the film has a regretful tone which proposes no solutions. In the end it is the ageing father (Charles Vanel) we most remember, not the three brothers. The past looks clearer than the future, and perhaps rosier because of the power of nostalgia.

(Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*, 8 October 1981)

Even for audiences to whom the precise issues are remote and unfamiliar, Rosi's film is extraordinary for its originality and range, and it has some startling incidental beauties: the arid landscape of white buildings against faded sandy soil; formal moments like the sons' tears for their mother; the little funeral procession; the old man's and the child's mutual comfort as they lie side by side in the night. The particular strength of the film is the reality of the characters that survives the somewhat schematic approach. The reality is not compromised by the use of a French-Italian cast, with stars like Philippe Noiret and Andréa Ferréol playing easily alongside peasant non-professionals.

(David Robinson, *The Times*, 9 October 1981)

Three Brothers unfurls with a subtle slowness that's as mesmerising as anything Rosi has done. The camera itself moves to mimic the push-and-pull fascination of the past—in teasy, queasy blends of track and zoom that push forward and pull back at the same time—and the characters' conscious and unconscious minds so seamlessly glide that visions leap gracefully, noiselessly in and out of view like dolphins in a sea.

(Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times*, 9 October 1981)

Any brief description will make this film seem dryly schematic rather than carefully considered. The film works through a group of richly realised people in a world observed with a loving, but unsentimental eye. Through the day and night of the film's action, Rosi is able to engage our minds and move our hearts.

(Philip French, *The Observer*, 11 October 1981)

If a sudden rush of masterpieces displaces Francesco Rosi's *Three Brothers* on my Top Ten list this year, then the rules will have to be changed or the voting rigged. I am inclined to think of this great, gentle humanist picture as the Italian director's most accomplished and perfectly realised.

(David Castell, *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 October 1981)

I do not trust films which present contemporary life as one of unrelieved gloom—in *Three Brothers*, orphaned children, broken marriages and assassinations fill the screen; we are told about the present "profound indifference towards human life". One villager even goes so far as to tell the judge, "Being a hero is a thing of the past". But of course it has always been a thing of the past, and there has never been a civilisation which did not at some level evince "a profound indifference towards human life". A society which has produced the Borgias should realise that. To indulge in these pieties as a way of explaining, or describing, contemporary society seems to me misguided. [...] *Three Brothers* takes a familiar theme, elaborates upon it in a picturesque manner, but relies in the end upon too many obvious emphases.

(Peter Ackroyd, *Spectator*, 11 October 1981)

All the principal characters are perceptively played, but it is the presence of the aged Charles Vanel as the grieving father who holds together a masterly film that has a rare resonance and beauty.

(Margaret Hinxman, *Daily Mail*, 16 October 81)

FRANCESCO ROSI ON THREE BROTHERS

An interview by Michel Ciment

This interview, originally conducted in French and translated by Tom Milne, was published in the Winter 1981/2 edition of *Sight & Sound*. Rosi is the first to speak.

I had been wanting to tell the story of an Italian family for a long time. I even remember talking about it to Tullio Kezich while we were filming *Salvatore Giuliano* twenty years ago. I was caught up in other projects and kept putting this one off, though I never gave up the idea. And the facts of Italian life haven't changed: the coexistence of different cultures, the continuing problems of emigration, the quest for work, desertion from the villages, the fate of people from the South cut off from their cultural origins and the traumatic effect this has on the way they think and live. One day, as though ripened by recent events in my own life, I felt a sort of urge to present them on the screen. In Italy, moreover, politics are becoming increasingly entangled with private concerns. I felt that to tell the story of a family from the South in Italy today was an opportunity to deal with every aspect of our lives, and that I could symbolise the country's three major problems through the choice of professions for the three brothers.

The judge, Raffaele, represents the plight of magistrates left exposed to every peril while required to make decisions on matters where the state has abdicated. Rocco, the teacher, confronts the question of disaffected youth. And Nicola, the factory worker, lives the problems of labour and unemployment. I knew my symbols also had a basis in reality because I know the choices a family from the South has to make. The father does everything he can for the eldest son and manages to send him to university. (Many lawyers, as a matter of fact, do come from the South.) The second son gets less help and stops short of university: that's Rocco. As for the third, his parents probably expected him to stay and work on the farm with them, but he finally succumbed to the great dream of the factory in the North.

Then something happened while Tonino Guerra and I were working on this subject. His wife is Russian, and he remembered a short story by Platonov that she had told him about. This story was the key which opened our own narrative, because we invented all the rest: an old man sends six telegrams to his six sons, summoning them to their mother's funeral.

Your films are usually taken from actuality (*Salvatore Giuliano, Hands Over the City, The Mattel Affair, Lucky Luciano*) or based on works of fiction (*Illustrious Corpses, Christ Stopped at Eboli, Uomini Contro*). This time you have what is to all intents and purposes an original story. It's a new experience for you, the creation of an imaginary world.

The important thing was to find a structure; the rest was personal experiences that Tonino Guerra and I had lived through. I recognise myself, perhaps for the first time, in the situations I have set up. As for the public aspect of the film, it is the historic moment we are going through in Italy, with its chaos and its parade of violence. But for me the film talks first and foremost about love: love for parents, a wife, a little girl, love for nature, for one's own dignity, for the demands one must impose on oneself when faced by specific choices. When Raffaele accepts his appointment to a case involving terrorism, thereby running the risk of assassination, he is not playing the hero but deciding to go on exercising his profession, which is to administer the law. For me, this is a gesture of love towards the conception he has of his own honesty, towards a certain intellectual discipline in the conduct of his life. The film may seem very gloomy, but in this sense it transmits a great ray of hope.

The film is rather like a cross between *Illustrious Corpses* (the extreme social violence, the problem of justice) and *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (the perception of nature and the countryside).

That is really the result of my experiences on earlier films. It is the sum of my work, but also of my life recently. With *Three Brothers,* I wanted to open a window on the present in which I live. I have always felt that films, even bad films, bear witness to their times. If the average Italian film today is inferior to what it was twenty years ago, this is a reflection of the situation in which we live, where vulgarity, irresponsibility and cynicism present a facade for evading the problems that confront us: corruption in public life, the difficulty of achieving a political and social equilibrium. And in *Three Brothers,* after all, I trace my personal history through the story of my family and my native region.

How far is the film autobiographical?

I have only one brother and I have never lived in the country. I didn't know it at all before I became a film-maker, and first made contact with it through *La Sfida.* I came to understand it better while making *Salvatore Giuliano.* It was at that time, too, contemplating the Sicilian cemeteries, that I overcame the horror of death which had been handed down to me by my mother. Because in Naples death may fascinate but it is still felt to be repellent... and the fascination it arouses in Sicilians is a very different thing. In Naples I experienced nature only through the sea. But I find nothing nostalgic about the countryside, no yearning for an elegiac way of life. Quite the contrary. What it stands for is the possibility of rediscovering the tough peasant strain that exists in all of us, the values of an older civilisation. That civilisation is disappearing. The state can profess a clear conscience because it offers aid, but it's also destroying the man of the South by taking away his sense of responsibility. Many young people in the South today seek security in routine clerking jobs, abandoning all desire to work productively.

Although the context isn't autobiographical, are some of the details?

My mother died two years ago. I went to her funeral with my brother, but we didn't want our father to come with us because he was too old and tired. When we returned, we found him back at the house, sitting bolt upright in a chair. Instead of the woollen jacket he usually wore, he was dressed up like a diplomat in a grey suit, just sitting there without moving. And on his finger, where he had never worn a ring before, was my mother's wedding ring. You don't talk to old people because you have nothing to say to them. You don't know what to talk about. Last year I went to see my father and I talked to him, I tried to tell him things. Then a silence fell which lasted for... years. Suddenly my father said, 'We must do it quickly.'—'What do you mean? What must we do quickly...?'

He died as we were filming *Three Brothers.* I let my assistant do the shot which precedes Nicola's arrival at his wife's place with the little girl on roller-skates, and then took over again.

Why did you choose Puglia as the setting for the story?

It's a very distinctive area. It's very harsh country, predominantly rocky, where the main activity was breeding sheep, goats and cattle. Not so many years ago, young people were still being sold in the marketplace at Altamurra, the agricultural centre for the area. This was called "la vendita degli alani", the 'alani' meaning sheepdogs, and the farmers bought them like dogs, under contract, and used them like dogs, for herding the livestock. The landscape is quite different from the one in *Eboli,* although Lucania is very near. The inhabitants are not different; they have the same dignity, the same reserve, but there is a great gentleness in them, the gentleness one sees in Charles Vanel's face. What attracted me was the landscape, and those great white farmhouses I had seen on my travels, built of stone as durable as the peasants themselves.

It is a film about intimate relationships, yet although the temptation must have been considerable, you follow your usual principle of resisting psychology.

For me, the psychology of a film has nothing to do with the psychology of the characters; it has to do with the montage. One must understand the characters through the film as a whole, through the context in which they are placed, through the discourse which is established. I wanted to tell a story which I hoped would have the scope and thrust of a novel. I wanted to disrupt the narrative but without losing overall unity, which had to be a narrative unity. Tonino and I started to write, inventing without knowing where we were going. It was like shuffling a pack of cards. And gradually each card fell into the place that was waiting for it. When I unhesitatingly selected my three symbol-characters, I felt some resistance. It's too schematic, I was told. But I knew I could bring them to life through the *mise en scène.*

In your work there is usually a considerable difference between the finished film and the script as written. You allow yourself a good deal of freedom with respect to the script.

Shooting a film is always an ordeal for a film-maker, understandably so if one thinks of the problems to be resolved. In my case, I get up very early in the morning. When I arrive on the set, I have already decided what I want to do, where I'll put the camera, what I want from the actors. But Vanel's contribution to *Three Brothers,* for example, was considerable. Everything he does seems entirely natural, but I'm sure it's the result of study which has had the time to mature over the years. He lent us all a sort of serenity. During filming he was like the stones of that old farmhouse, like the natural world about him; he hit it off immediately with the dog, for instance, and with the little girl, and the rhythms of the film began to adopt the cadence of his movements.

Your characters, like yourself, have difficulty getting to sleep; and in their sleep they rehearse their lives on stage.

The film has several planes. There is the present moment, then planes of personal memory, collective memory and future possibility. The most interesting thing about the narrative structure is the balance between its parts. Once we had decided to tell the story of several characters immersed in the present moment, at the same time letting the audience see where they have come from and where they might go, it was inevitable that we would end up with this representation of past, present and future. The father's memories are personal ones; Rocco's—of the arrival of the liberating Americans—belong to collective memory. But shortly afterwards, at the end of the film, we return to the present and, simultaneously, a projection into the future. The little girl gives the old man an egg, the wheel comes full circle, and where the film began with death it ends with life. In his *Utopia della Città del Sole.* Tommaso Campanella imagines an ideal city composed of concentric circles where the outer circle is inhabited by old people and children holding each other by the hand...

Rocco's dream is designed to look rather like those old 'tuppence coloured' sheets, or even certain Maoist posters.

That character, I felt, would be unable to imagine any such situation except in the most juvenile way. For him, America, Russia or even Naples assume the form of a naive daydream. Rocco is taciturn, like his father, though if the father doesn't talk it's chiefly because people don't talk to the old nowadays. No one asks him anything, and because he has great dignity, he doesn't much care to start up any arguments. It's true, too, that Vittorio Mezzogiorno (Rocco) looks very much like Vanel, and that's why I wanted to bring their profiles together in the same shot... to give the audience a physical sense of their kinship.

The shot of the little girl playing in the grain heralds the flashback where the mother is playing in the sand and loses her wedding ring...

I wanted to show a day at the seaside, which is a once a year event for the peasant. When he paddles in the sea or breathes the sea air, he does it with enormous intensity, as though he felt he were storing up reserves for the whole year. At the same time, he is afraid of the sea. Man is a land animal, they say down there.

The business about the wedding ring was something that happened with my father, and I was going to end the film with a shot of the old man finding his wife's wedding ring on the chest of drawers and putting it on his finger alongside his own ring. I couldn't just spring this on the audience at the end. I had to prepare the ground. So we thought of this scene by the sea: he is washing down a horse, she is playing in the sand and loses her ring. The grain in which the little girl plays at burying herself of course conjures the sand. In Lucania, while I was filming *Eboli,* I visited an old farm where they had mountains of grain in which the women worked barefoot. We used that memory here—I was also thinking of the granary in Visconti's *Senso*—and it wasn't very hard to imagine a little girl wanting to bury herself in those heaps. This organic development of an image and an idea is what making films is all about.

The name Rocco will doubtless make people think of Visconti's film [*Rocco and His Brothers*]...

To tell you the truth, that didn't occur to me at first. But having chosen the name Rocco—an automatic choice because everyone in this area between Lucania and Puglia is called Rocco or Nicola—I thought of Luchino and was pleased, because his indirect presence in the film enabled me to express my affection and respect.

How do you stand ideologically in relation to the three brothers?

I see myself in each of them. The judge represents my wish to rationalise, to dominate things like fear by exercising reason. The factory worker is my fury at my inability to change reality. The teacher is my Utopian side. But I see myself in the other characters, too. My thirst for knowledge, my human curiosity, that's the little girl. My yearning for the calm, considered presence which can only come from vast human experience, that's Vanel.

The two discussions in the film about informing show the relativity of ethics in politics. The judge says that terrorists must be denounced. Rocco refuses to give his pupils' names to the police. They are both right...

Rocco knows—and says—that if he denounces the boys they'll go to prison, and prison doesn't permit the re-education which is his main concern. With the judge it is a different matter: he is answering peasants who have asked him what one should do if one witnesses an act of terrorism. He tells them that the case of Guido Rossa, a Genoese workman murdered because he had denounced some killers, may suggest an answer. At Rossa's funeral, one of his friends told a television reporter that they shouldn't have left him to stand alone, they should all have denounced the killers. That way fear can be exorcised, because a crowd of witnesses can't be liquidated.

Your films often include sequences in which a character looks at photographs.

Yes, Alain Cuny in *Uomini Contro,* [Lino] Ventura in *Illustrious Corpses,* and here Noiret. It's very simple: this is the civilisation of the image. A photograph is a testimony to someone, to a period; it's a suspended moment in the life of someone who goes on living. I adore photographs. Photography could well be at the source of my passion for cinema.

Do you always use the same lens? Or do you change from film to film, or in the course of a film?

For our last two or three films, Pasqualino De Santis and I have been using the Pan Cinor Angenieux, which allows lens apertures that aren't within the normal range and sometimes lets you boost tracking movements with very slight zooms. As a rule I don't like zooms. On *The Moment of Truth* I started using a telephoto lens (a 300mm), and I think I was one of the first people to give it a narrative function in a fiction film. It was lying in some forgotten cellar at the Istituto Luce in Rome, and I thought of using it because it seemed the only way to capture the conjunction of man and bull. Otherwise, I would have had to follow the usual practice in bullfighting films and work with doubles. In real settings where the space is very constricted, the Pan Cinor Angenieux has helped me a lot. with tracking movements prolonged by discreetly opening or closing the zoom. In *Eboli* and *Three Brothers* you don't notice these shots; they are very simple, and that's what I like, although they are difficult to do. There is a complicated shot in *Three Brothers,* when Rocco and Raffaele are talking in the bedroom: Raffaele leans on a chest of drawers, returns to his bed, then moves towards Rocco's bed. It was almost impossible to manage it in a single shot because the room was so small; only the Pan Cinor made it feasible. An equally difficult shot was the one in which one brother weeps at the kitchen window while the other two are seen in the distance.

What sort of lighting were you after in this film, compared with *Eboli?*

I leave it to the location to influence me. My problem is to render reality, the reality manifest in this setting, without corrupting it. Like my first lighting cameraman Gianni Di Venanzo, and his pupil Pasqualino De Santis, I was brought up in that school of cinema. When I was experimenting in my early days, Pasqualino was already with me as a camera operator. If I'm in a room, what I want to capture is the natural light in that room. The difference between the interiors in *Eboli* and *Three Brothers* is the walls. Outside, of course, the difference is one of landscape. I remember that when I said we were going back to the same region, there were some misgivings among my collaborators, who probably felt we were going to repeat ourselves. But in *Eboli* it's all parched, arid mountains or green valleys and in *Three Brothers* it's a landscape of stones. In *Eboli* the walls were grey and the light indoors was dark, with a chiaroscuro effect. In *Three Brothers* the shadows are sharply defined, the contrasts glaring. In films like mine, which try to interpret reality by respecting it, constant efforts have to be made not to destroy that reality.

You seem to be fond of very austere settings: not just the functional style of offices and assembly rooms, but even the interiors where your characters live. You also enlarge these settings, you like to give them breadth.

That's the 18mm lens. But its true to say that there is a choice there. This progressive elimination of superfluous details answers a desire for synthesis. As you acquire experience, you realise that by putting too much into the frame you distract attention from what is really important. If you have a subject which demands an abundance of details, then you must *also* achieve a synthesis of that abundance. In most cases, though, I am trying to pare down, to concentrate. You can focus attention on two pictures hanging on a wall better than you can if there are ten; otherwise, it's the wall as a whole you are looking at.

Is your approach to music similar in working with Piero Piccioni?

When I'm preparing a film, there is usually a piece of music following me along. Even if it isn't heard in the film, it helps me in my work. When I was shooting *Salvatore Giuliano* in Sicily, I had a record-player with me and I used to listen all the time to *Le Sacre du Printemps.* I don't know why. Or rather I do: in Stravinsky's music I could hear the land and the relationship of the Sicilian peasant to it, this story of savagery and suffering. While making *Hands Over the City,* by contrast, what I heard all the time was the symphonic jazz of Stan Kenton, or Count Basie and Duke Ellington. And on *Three Brothers* my constant companion was Bach variations played on the guitar. Later on I talk to Piccioni and we analyse, we exchange ideas. He suggests things. But I would never dare to use classical music to accompany my films; Vivaldi, for example, is a constant friend, but I'd never dream of using him.

The soundtrack at the beginning of *Three Brothers,* with its heartbeat rhythm, recalls *The Mattei Affair.*

There's no music in *The Mattei Affair;* or, rather, it's electronic music. Piccioni explored every possibility of the electronic control panel, and it's one of the most interesting film scores I know. For *Three Brothers* we had a recording of a surgical operation, so it's the beating of a real heart that is mixed with the music.

At what point did you decide to open the film on those shots of windows?

I wanted to set up a location shot of the city rubbish dump in Naples, a fantastic place from which you could see the section of town built complete with high rise blocks after *Hands Over the City.* But it no longer existed, and I couldn't find any equivalent. So I thought of this wall with its windows like empty eye sockets.

Is Rocco's dream perhaps a relic of your old project to do a musical comedy about Naples?

Maybe, but not consciously. I wanted this teacher's dream to be naive in form, to represent a Utopia. It also had to do with Neapolitan popular art, with the way songs are performed on stage. The song Pino Daniele sings during the dream says that Masagnello, hero of the popular uprisings in Naples during the 17th century, has grown up and come back. The song is a crazy fantasy, as Daniele says.

The grandmother and the little girl in *Three Brothers* end up as rather shadowy figures. It's the men who never stop explaining themselves...

That's because they are touching on topics that need to be talked about. When a judge meets his brother, a worker twenty years younger whom he rarely sees, it is quite natural that in talking about problems of such urgency to each of them as terrorism, violence and employment, they should want to explain themselves. And as a film-maker dealing with such sensitive aspects of the reality of my country, I feel such explanations are necessary. I accept the risk of seeming didactic—a charge which has been made against the dialogue between the two brothers in their bedroom. Some people feel that there is no place in a work of art for such conversations. But I don't agree, and I don't at all mind having the idiom of radio, newspapers, "television, politicians or private citizens" turn up as part of a film. It seems to me there is a place for it in the general economy of the work of art. Furthermore, a film is not made for a few thousand intellectuals who are in a position to read and write from morning to night. Most people in Italy live in despondency and confusion, and in dealing with current situations one must do so with clarity, and risk seeming schoolmasterish.

The oak tree becomes something of a leitmotif in the film.

I'll use a pompous image and say it stands for the fatherland: the age-old tree representing tradition, the family. When Rocco arrives at the house, he feels impelled to touch the tree, to caress it. But in this there is no expression of nostalgia for the past, no attempt to find in rural society an answer to the questions being asked. I think one must move forward, but without losing contact with the cultural authenticity of the past which is now under such serious threat. That is what the relationship of the old man and the little girl expresses: the notion of continuity.

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Three Brothers was digitally restored from original film elements at 2K resolution. The work was carried out at Technicolor in Rome.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by Michael Brooke
Executive Producer Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
Production Assistant Liane Cunje
Proofing Michael Brooke, Anthony Nield
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling IBF Digital
Artist Matthew Griffin
Design Jack Pemberton

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Nina Bishop, John Carino, Stefania Carnevale, Michel Ciment, Graham Jones, David Mackenzie, Derek Malcolm, Millicent Marcus, Carolina Rosi, Technicolor Rome, Gianni Vittori, Rob Winter

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